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ABSTRACT

This paper considers the importance of student housing to the goal of student learning, and suggests ways in which campus residential programs can become strategic partners in student learning. It proposes partnerships between campus housing professionals and faculty colleagues and presents a number of models for consideration: residential colleges; living-learning centers, specialized residential programs directly connected to specific academic programs; theme housing, which allows students with special interests to live together; academic residential programs, which provide academic support services and programs within the residential setting; residential learning centers, in which students who live together also attend class together; freshman year experience, which offers specialized housing configurations to maximize academic services to first-year students; and use of technology such as residential computer labs, in-room networks, and in-house cable televisions channels. Also considered is the contribution of architectural and interior design to the learning process. (CH)

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Setting New Directions By Making New Connections

THE RESIDENTIAL NEXUS



A FOCUS ON STUDENT LEARNING

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NEXUS:

1) A means of connection: link 2) a connected series or group
Webster's II Dictionary

INTRODUCTION

In his definitive 1987 study of American Higher Education, Ernest Boyer reported that a fragmented sense of community had come into existence on many North American college and university campuses. In reference to university residences, Boyer stated that his study group found "a great separation - sometimes to the point of isolation, between academic and social life on campus. Colleges like to speak of the campus as community, and yet what is being learned in most residence halls has little connection to the classrooms; indeed, it may undermine the educational purposes of the college"(p.5).

Subsequent national reports have had similar observations. Across the United States, responses have been generated by leaders in academic and student affairs areas to address deficiencies in the undergraduate experience. A renewed commitment has emerged toward developing campus community, reforming undergraduate education and placing the focus of the educational enterprise on its core mission--
STUDENT LEARNING.

As Housing and Residence Education professionals, we must strive to be an integral part of this movement. Reform is occurring within academe around student learning and undergraduate education. Partnerships must be formed with our academic and student affairs colleagues to build community on our campuses around student learning. With this document, it is hoped that ACUHO-I will join in this movement with the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), who have each published documents which focus on student learning. It is hoped that the recommendations from this report are applicable to campuses around the world. All members of ACUHO-I are encouraged to seek applications of this document on their own campuses.



THE RESIDENTIAL NEXUS - MERGING CURRICULAR AND COCURRICULAR LEARNING

University Housing and Residence Life operations have great potential for being a nexus point in this movement. Tremendous opportunities exist for residential programs to become strategic partners in the enterprise of student learning--particularly where in-class instruction merges with the out-of-class experience. More than ever, the value of the residential experience is being espoused by academic and student affairs colleagues. To create coherence in the undergraduate student experience, curricular learning opportunities must be extended beyond the confines of the traditional classroom. Conversely, cocurricular learning opportunities and programs must be developed to intentionally support and be connected to the curriculum. The Residential Nexus is the most viable setting for creating these connections.

This residential nexus can cultivate new and creative opportunities for students to connect with one another and with faculty around student learning. Innovative curricular and cocurricular programs can emerge from these connections. To achieve this, partnerships must be formed among faculty, student affairs staff, and students with the primary commitment to enhance student learning. To ensure that these relationships are mutually beneficial, common educational goals and objectives should be developed between these three areas. *Student learning must become the core value of all partners.*

FORMING PARTNERSHIPS - A NEW ROLE FOR HOUSING PROFESSIONALS

For many years, housing professionals often have functioned quite autonomously within our campus communities. As self-supporting enterprises, the financial and programmatic aspects of our operations have evolved in a somewhat disconnected fashion from the core academic priorities of our institutions. Coinciding with this, a several-decade trend within the academic community has created faculty reward systems that value research, publications and the attainment of external funding. These trends have culminated in a campus culture which has devalued teaching, learning and the undergraduate experience. With the renewed focus on student learning, we are seeing a swing back to the core purposes of higher education.

This resurgence of interest in student learning creates great potential for student affairs staff and faculty to form mutually-beneficial partnerships. To successfully connect with our academic colleagues, Residence Life and Housing staff members must become knowledgeable of emerging trends in learning theory and pedagogical techniques. Through these recent innovations, partnerships should be developed with faculty colleagues. Recent learning theory initiatives in the areas of involvement theory, active learning, collaborative and cooperative learning, supplemental instruction, learning community models, and peer education are all examples of learning strategies which can be enhanced through the creation of partnerships between residential education and classroom instruction.

The differences that exist between the "faculty culture" and the "student affairs culture" can often be a deterrent to the formation of successful partnerships. Residence Life professionals must gain an understanding of these differences and serve as the catalyst for overcoming them. Our knowledge base must include a wide range of institutional issues and priorities as well as an understanding of emerging trends in Academic Affairs.

SPECIALIZED PROGRAMS AND SERVICES WHICH FOCUS ON STUDENT LEARNING: THE NEXUS POINT

As Student Learning has become the point of contact for the development of strategic partnerships between Housing professionals and our academic colleagues, new programmatic offerings have emerged which



connect classroom instruction and the out-of-class experience. Housing professionals must continue to strive to create opportunities for these two settings to come together. The following models represent existing programs that have evolved on many campuses.

- **Residential Colleges:** The Collegiate model is the most fundamental type of residentially-based academic program. Dating back to 1200 a.d. in England, the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge were used as models for the original institutions of higher education in North America and Australia. The collegiate model offers degree-granting programs in settings where students and faculty live and work together. All classrooms, library support, faculty offices and residences, and student residences are in the same facility. Besides Great Britain, the evolution of the collegiate model has occurred in many countries, including Australia, Canada, and the United States.
- **Living-Learning Centers** - Specialized residential programs that have direct connections with a specific academic program are generally referred to as Living-Learning centers. Typically, very strong partnerships are formed between an academic program and the residence staff. Such offerings include Foreign Language programs; programs for Math, Science, and Engineering majors; and Pre-Med programs.
- **Theme Housing** - Programs that offer opportunities for students with special interests to live and work together are referred to as Theme Housing opportunities. Residential staff often are the key sponsors of these programs, yet receive significant support from academic and student affairs colleagues. Such programs might include Wellness Halls, Leadership Halls, International Halls, Substance Free Housing.
- **Academic Residential Programs** - Providing academic support services and programs to all students often requires strong partnerships between academic affairs and student affairs staff. The residential setting can be an ideal location for providing "front-line" service in the areas of academic advising, career planning and placement, tutoring, and study group formation; and programming in study skills, time management, library usage, and so forth. Such programming requires coordination and collaboration between a variety of academic constituents on campus.
- **Residential Learning Communities** - Creating opportunities for clusters of students who live together to attend classes together are generally referred to as residential learning communities. Close working relationships must be developed with faculty in order to maximize the benefits of these offerings. Specialized course assignments, study groups, and faculty involvement programs all can take place in the living-group when close partnerships are formed.
- **The Freshman Year Experience** - Specialized housing configurations which maximize student affairs and academic affairs services to first-year students have great merit. To provide institutionally-based coordinated opportunities to new students, strong partnerships must be formed between the key campus players who support the transitional needs of new freshmen. The residential setting is often the ideal setting for the provision of these services.
- **The Role of Technology** - The use of technologies to complement the learning process will become a critical component of residential educational offerings. As we look to the future, voice, video, and data technologies will be a primary venue for making in-class/out-of-class connections. Residential computer labs, in-room network connections, in-house cable television channels, and the provision of training and support services are becoming more and more a part of the residential experience. These services must become a strategic component of an institutional plan to create a "seamlessness" to the educational experience, which connects the classroom, the library, and the residential setting. Although it is difficult to predict how these technologies will impact the learning experience, they will be the avenue which allows learning to occur anywhere and at any time.



RESIDENCE STAFF AND THEIR EMERGING ROLE IN ENHANCING STUDENT LEARNING

Housing and Residence Education staff members have a long tradition of providing meaningful out-of-class learning opportunities for students. These cocurricular programs have greatly enhanced the educational experiences of undergraduate students. For several decades, programmatic models have been developed by Residence Education staff members which have had theoretical underpinnings in the Student Development and/or Wellness constructs. Although beneficial for helping professionals understand student maturational levels and need areas, these models have had moderate success in engaging students and faculty in the out-of-class experience. In addition, these models have at best been only loosely connected to the formal academic and educational missions of our institutions. Because of this, these models have not been readily embraced by institutional leaders.

The student learning reform movement has created an opportunity for developing a new paradigm regarding the role of Housing and Residence Education staff members. Professional and paraprofessional staff members must become key players in the area of student learning, learning theory, and pedagogical innovation. This new focus on student learning will greatly influence staff selection and training practices, programming models, and the role that Housing staff will play within the context of the greater campus community. This new role will allow Housing and Residence Education staff to be key players in the core functions of their institutions and be equal partners with faculty and student affairs colleagues.

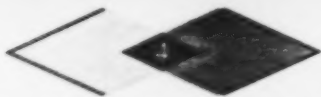
STUDENT - TO - STUDENT AND STUDENT - TO - FACULTY INTERACTIONS AROUND LEARNING

Recent research findings (Astin, Light, Pascarella and Terrenzini) indicate that the most significant environmental characteristics which enhance student learning focus on the type and quality of interactions students have with each other and with their faculty. In the Harvard Assessment Seminars, Light found that "students who get the most out of college, who grow the most academically, and who are the happiest, organize their time to include interpersonal activities with faculty members, or with fellow students, built around substantive academic work" (p. 6). The Residential Nexus--where students and faculty can often come together on more common ground--will provide a myriad of opportunities for these types of activities. The reforms being promoted in this document ultimately will impact the way students interact with each other and with faculty members in a manner which will allow student learning to become the focal point for the human interactions that will occur in the residential setting.

RESIDENTIAL FACILITIES AND THEIR IMPACT ON STUDENT LEARNING

As administrators of the maintenance, renovation, and construction of the facilities where the Residential Nexus will occur, Housing and Residence Education professionals must continually monitor and assess the impact these facilities have on student learning. Clearly, architectural design, interior design and general upkeep issues all impact students' behavior and ultimately their ability to learn. As we move forward in this area, Housing professionals must obtain greater expertise in this emerging field. Architectural and interior design schemes must take into consideration not only aesthetics and long-term usage issues, but also must address the impact these settings have on promoting and enhancing the learning process.

In addition, assurances must be made to provide equal and open access to facilities and programs on our campuses. ACUHO-I member institutions must continue to strive toward full compliance with the tenets of the legal frameworks and/or regulations which define expectations for barrier-free facilities for students and staff with disabilities.



LEARNING STYLE DIFFERENCES

As Residence Life professionals seek out new and different strategies for enhancing student learning in the residential setting, it is imperative that different student learning styles be acknowledged and addressed. Learning style differences occur at various levels. Some students are more successful in settings which promote active and collaborative learning opportunities. Others prefer more passive environments and techniques. Students also differ in their levels of tolerance for noise and activity levels in the residence hall setting. Many students prefer to pursue academic work in group settings, while others prefer to work alone. Other differences may occur around ethnic or cultural issues, nationality differences and gender differences. The residential setting can provide unique opportunities for supporting the different learning styles that exist within resident student populations. Attempts should be made to support these differences in the development of residence hall policies, architectural considerations, residence hall programming, initiatives, and in staff selection, training, and support constructs.

ASSESSMENT

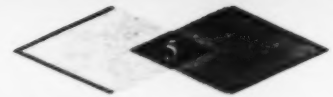
Assessment should play an important part of all residential activities and programs, especially those that promote and enhance student learning. A comprehensive plan of assessing learning outcomes should provide both formative and summative information. All assessment activities should also support institutional mission statements and educational goals.

CONCLUSIONS

- The emergence of learning and learning theory as a foundation for the future of Student Affairs work is an exciting trend which offers great potential for enhancing the role practitioners play on our campuses. For Housing and Residence Education professionals, an array of opportunities exist for making our facilities, programs and staff a nexus point for merging the curricular and cocurricular settings. Decisions regarding the implementation of these recommendations must be made on a campus by campus basis.
- Individualized programs should be developed which specifically address the particular community needs of each campus. Our students will only be hurt by continuing the fragmented approaches we have manifested in the past. Our only chance for overcoming the deficiencies of the past lies in the intentional cultivation of partnerships among students, faculty, and student affairs staff--built around student learning as the foundation. Housing and Residence Education professionals have an opportunity to become key players in this reform movement and we must seize this opportunity to do so.

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The Association of College and University Housing Officers-International is a non-profit organization that provides professional development experiences for its members by sponsoring programs, services, publications, and research. Association members on college and university campuses worldwide participate in conferences, workshops, committees, and task forces. These activities provide a means of exchanging and distributing professional information related to the various aspects of student residence facilities and their related operations. The Executive Director and staff of the Central Office in Columbus, Ohio, the elected and appointed members of the Executive Board, and numerous volunteer committee and task force members provide leadership for the organization.

The Association actively encourages participation by members of underrepresented groups based on ethnicity, age, gender, religious preference, sexual orientation, and disability in all ACUHO-I and institutional activities.

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